

CHAPTER XVIII

DOUBTS AND DIFFICULTIES

The Stanton girls and Mrs. Montrose came in early that afternoon. They had heard rumors of the arrest of Jones and were eager to learn what had occurred. Patsy and Beth followed them to their rooms to give them every known detail and canvass the situation in all its phases.

"Goldstein has been an angel all afternoon," said Flo. "He grinned and capered about like a schoolboy and some of us guessed he'd been left a fortune."

"He ought to be ashamed of himself." Patsy indignantly asserted. "The man admitted to Uncle John that Ajo is the biggest stockholder in the Continental, the president, to boot; yet Goldstein wouldn't lift a finger to help him and positively refused to obey his request to go to him after he was arrested."

"I know about that," said Aunt Jane, quietly. "Goldstein talked to me about the affair this afternoon and declared his conviction that young Jones is really a pearl thief. He has taken a violent dislike to the boy and is delighted to think his stock will be taken away from him."

Maud had silently listened to this dialogue as she dressed for dinner.

But now she impetuously broke into the conversation, saying:

"Something definite ought to be done for the boy. He needs intelligent assistance. I'm afraid his situation is serious."

"That is what Arthur thinks," said Beth. "He says that unless he can furnish proof that he is not Jack Andrews, and that he came by those pearls honestly, he will be shipped to Austria for trial. No one knows what those foreigners will do to him, but he would probably fare badly in their hands."

"Such being the logical conclusion," said Maud, "we must make our fight now, at the examination."

"Uncle John has engaged a lawyer," announced Patsy, "and if he proves bright and intelligent he ought to be able to free Ajo."

"I'd like to see that lawyer, and take his measure," answered Maud, musingly, and her wish was granted soon after they had finished dinner. Colby entered the hotel, jaunty as ever, and Arthur met him and introduced him to the girls.

"You must forgive me for coming on a disagreeable mission," began the young attorney, "but I have promised the judge that I would produce all the pearls Mr. Jones gave you, not later than to-morrow morning. He wants them as evidence, and to compare privately with Le Drieux's list,

although he will likely have the expert at his elbow. So I can't promise that you will ever get your jewels back again."

"Oh. You think, then, that Mr. Jones is guilty?" said Maud coldly.

"No, indeed; I believe he is innocent. A lawyer should never suspect his client, you know. But to win I must prove my case, and opposed to me is that terrible Le Drieux, who insists he is never mistaken."

"Arthur--Mr. Weldon--says you understand pearls as well as Mr. Le Drieux does," suggested Patsy.

"I thank him; but he is in error. I chattered to the judge about pearls, it is true, because I found he couldn't tell a pearl from a glass bead; and I believe I even perplexed Le Drieux by hinting at a broad knowledge on the subject which I do not possess. It was all a bit of bluff on my part. But by to-morrow morning this knowledge will be a fact, for I've bought a lot of books on pearls and intend to sit up all night reading them."

"That was a clever idea," said Uncle John, nodding approval.

"So my mission here this evening is to get the pearls, that I may study them as I read," continued Colby. "Heretofore I've only seen the things through a plate glass window, or a show case. The success of our defense depends upon our refuting Le Drieux's assertion that the pearls found in

Jones' possession are a part of the Countess Ahmberg's collection. He has a full description of the stolen gems and I must be prepared to show that none of the Jones' pearls is on the list."

"Can you do that?" asked Maud.

She was gazing seriously into the young man's eyes and this caused him to blush and stammer a little as he replied:

"I--I hope to, Miss Stanton."

"And are you following no other line of defense?" she inquired.

He sat back and regarded the girl curiously for a moment.

"I would like you to suggest some other line of defense," he replied.

"I've tried to find one--and failed."

"Can't you prove he is not Jack Andrews?"

"Not if the identity of the pearls is established," said the lawyer. "If the pearls were stolen, and if Jones cannot explain how he obtained possession of them, the evidence is prima facia that he is Jack Andrews, or at least his accomplice. Moreover, his likeness to the photograph is somewhat bewildering, you must admit."

This gloomy view made them all silent for a time, each thoughtfully considering the matter. Then Maud asked:

"Do you know the cash value of Mr. Jones' stock in the Continental Film Company?"

Colby shook his head, but Uncle John replied:

"Goldstein told me it is worth millions."

"Ah!" exclaimed the girl. "There, then, is our proof."

The lawyer reflected, with knitted brows.

"I confess I don't quite see your point," said he.

"How much were those stolen pearls worth?" asked the girl.

"I don't know."

"You know they were not worth millions. Jack Andrews was an adventurer, by Le Drieux's showing; he was a fellow who lived by his wits and generally earned his livelihood by gambling with the scions of wealthy families. Even had he stolen the Countess' pearls and disposed of the collection at enormous prices--which a thief is usually unable to do--he would still have been utterly unable to purchase a controlling interest

in the Continental stock."

She spoke with quiet assurance, but her statement roused the group to sudden excitement.

"Hooray!" cried Patsy. "There's your proof, Mr. Colby."

"The logic of genius," commented Uncle John.

"Why, it's proof positive!" said Beth.

"It is certainly a strong argument in favor of the boy's innocence," asserted Arthur Weldon.

"Maud's a wonder when she wakes up. She ought to have been a 'lady detective,'" remarked Flo, regarding her sister admiringly.

Colby, at first startled, was now also regarding Maud Stanton with open admiration; but there was an odd smile on his lips, a smile of indulgent toleration.

"Le Drieux's statement connects Andrews with two other pearl robberies," he reminded her. "The necklace of the Princess Lemoine is said to be priceless, and the Grandison collection stolen in London was scarcely less valuable than that of Countess Ahmberg."

"Allowing all that," said Mr. Merrick, "two or three hundred thousand dollars would doubtless cover the value of the entire lot. I am quite certain, Mr. Colby, that Miss Stanton's suggestion will afford you an excellent line of defense."

"I shall not neglect it, you may be sure," replied the lawyer. "Tonight I'll try to figure out, as nearly as possible, the total cash value of all the stolen pearls, and of course Jones will tell us what he paid for his stock, or how much it is worth. But I am not sure this argument will have as much weight as Miss Stanton suggests it may. A bold gambler, such as Andrews, might have obtained a huge sum at Baden Baden or Monte Carlo; and, were he indeed so clever a thief as his record indicates, he may have robbed a bank, or stolen in some way an immense sum of money. Logically, the question has weight and I shall present it as effectively as I can; but, as I said, I rely more on my ability to disprove the identity of the pearls, on which the expert Le Drieux lays so much stress. Jones will have a thorough and formal examination within a few days--perhaps to-morrow--and if the judge considers that Andrews the pearl thief has been captured, he will be held here pending the arrival from Washington of the extradition papers--say two or three weeks longer."

"Then we shall have all that time to prove his innocence?" inquired Maud.

"Unfortunately, no. There will be no further trial of the prisoner until he gets to Vienna and is delivered to the authorities there. All our work

must be done previous to the formal examination."

"You do not seem very hopeful," observed Maud, a hint of reproach in her tone.

"Then appearances are against me, Miss Stanton," replied the lawyer with a smile. "This is my first important case, and if I win it my future is assured; so I mean to win. But in order to do that I must consider the charge of the prosecution, the effect of its arguments upon the judge, and then find the right means to combat them. When I am with you, the friends of the accused, I may consider the seamy side of the fabric; but the presiding judge will find me so sure of my position that he will instinctively agree with me."

They brought him the pearls Jones had presented to them and then the lawyer bade them good night and went to his office to master the history of pearls in general and those famous ones stolen from Countess Ahmberg in particular.

When he had gone Uncle John remarked:

"Well, what do you think of him?"

They seemed in doubt.

"I think he will do all he can," said Patsy.

"And he appears quite a clever young man," added Beth, as if to encourage them.

"Allowing all that," said Maud, gravely, "he has warned us of the possibility of failure. I cannot understand how the coils of evidence have wrapped themselves so tightly around poor Ajo."

"That," asserted Flo, "is because you cannot understand Ajo himself. Nor can I; nor can any of us!"